

## THE JEWEL IN HISTORIC AYUTTHAYA'S GOLDEN CROWN

### *A Seniors Section visit to the "Golden Treasure Exhibition" on 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023*

Ayutthaya was once a magnificent city and was capital of the Kingdom of Siam from 1351 to 1767. It flourished as a trading hub and grew into one of the world's wealthiest and most cosmopolitan cities. Its strategic location allowed it to control crucial maritime trade routes, attracting merchants from Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. The city's prosperity was reflected in its many grand temples and palaces adorned with intricate architecture and artwork, bustling markets, and extensive waterways that facilitated transportation and trade.

In its heyday as a trading capital, the local population was supplemented with traders, court officials, mercenary soldiers (including some 300 warriors (*not Samurai*) from Japan) in the King's Army, together with their families. Estimates put that foreigners were, at around 25%, a significant proportion of the total population of some 400,000 people living in Ayutthaya at its peak.

However, Ayutthaya faced numerous conflicts with neighbouring kingdoms, and in 1767 it fell to and was destroyed by the invading Burmese army, leading to its decline. Today, Ayutthaya stands as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, preserving the remnants of its glorious past.



(Wat Rachaburana after the Burmese destruction)

Since 1969 the Fine Arts Department of Thailand has been undertaking renovations of the ruins, scaling up the project after the site was declared a Historical Park in 1976. This has resulted in the discovery of thousands of ornaments and objects, most made of pure gold, others of silver, together with various pottery items, all testament to the wealth of the city during its prime. All of these formed the basis for the construction and opening in November 2022 of a new fully airconditioned wing at the Chao Sam Phraya National Museum to house "The Golden Treasure Exhibition" covering all 8 rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, displaying 2,244 pieces of the above-mentioned items.



To us as visitors, the exhibition very much achieved its aim to highlight the rich heritage of Ayutthaya and provided a glimpse into the city's glorious past, its history, the cultural influences that shaped the Kingdom, and its contributions to Thai culture.

Without exception, all of our group thought the exhibition to be **'stunning and an absolute must visit when in Ayutthaya'**!

Terry Adams, Chair, Seniors Section Committee

*Below are photographs, including some taken by the visiting Seniors Section members during their visit on 25<sup>th</sup> May, others are from the Bangkok Post article "Treasures of the past" : <https://www.bangkokpost.com/travel/2513256/treasures-of-the-past>*







